

**The Honorable Steve Chabot, Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia**

**“Promoting Peace? Reexamining U.S. Aid to the Palestinian Authority, Part 1”**

**July 12, 2011**

I want to welcome all of my colleagues to this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. This hearing was called to assess the Obama Administration’s aid policy to the Palestinian Authority and to take stock of the challenges we continue to face.

On January 22, just two days after his inauguration, President Obama appointed Senator George Mitchell as Special Envoy for the Middle East. Two and a half years later, just days after accepting Senator Mitchell’s resignation, President Obama reiterated his belief that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of America’s “core interests” in the Middle East. Throughout these two and a half years, assistance to the Palestinian Authority has consistently remained a central pillar of the Administration’s policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unfortunately recent developments on the ground require that we reassess our current policy trajectory and, if necessary, adjust accordingly.

I recently travelled to Israel and the West Bank where I was able to gain first-hand knowledge of our efforts. Unfortunately, however, some of the challenges we face appear to intensify by the day. The current Palestinian leadership appears all too willing to sacrifice the tremendous gains that have been achieved by Prime Minister Fayyad’s state-building effort in the name of political theatrics. Instead of capitalizing on those gains through honest negotiations with Israel, the Palestinian leadership appears dead-set on pursuing a unilateral declaration of independence before the UN General Assembly this September. True Israeli-Palestinian peace will be made between two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, and not the 191 other members of the General Assembly. The road to Palestinian statehood does not start in New York, and it is not the place of the United States, the United Nations nor any other country or institution to short-circuit the requisite negotiations between the two parties. A unilateral declaration of independence is simply rejectionism by another name.

Similarly, the recent unity agreement between Hamas and Fatah is a very troubling development. I was, in fact, in Ramallah discussing with Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad his tremendously important state-building efforts when this agreement was likely signed. Shortly thereafter, I had the opportunity to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who expressed grave concern both for Israel’s security as well as for the prospects for peace. How, he asked us, could the Palestinian leadership be a serious partner for peace if it welcomed into its ranks vicious terrorists who continue to deny the very right of the State of Israel to exist? His concern is more than justified.

Although very few details have emerged since this document was signed and although it does not appear much has changed on the ground, the mere presence of this agreement raises serious concerns that regrettably we must now address. The Palestinian Antiterrorism Act of 2006 very clearly stipulates conditions that must be met in order for U.S. assistance to continue, including that any Palestinian government accept the three Quartet principles: Acknowledging Israel's right to exist, renouncing violence, and agreeing to abide by past agreements. No U.S. taxpayer money can or should go to a Palestinian government that does not embrace these three simple principles.

For years we have invested heavily both money and effort to help the Palestinians build a state for themselves. And our work has yielded results. The economy in the West Bank continues to improve. Parents are able to send their children out at night. Israelis have felt comfortable making concessions on security that would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. In no small part this is due to the hard work of the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC). General Moeller, I'd like to thank you for your continued service to our country. I am extremely impressed with the program you are running as well as the professionalism of the soldiers who are trained in it. And although I have my concerns given recent developments, it would be extremely unfortunate if we were to have to end this important program because of an irresponsible decision by those who would prefer the path of rejection to the path of peace.

We are rapidly approaching a watershed moment in U.S.-Palestinian relations. Both the reconciliation government and the pursuit of a unilateral declaration of independence at the UN could not be more contrary to U.S. interests in the region. The fact remains that rejectionist elements within the Palestinian leadership still refuse to sit and negotiate in good faith even as Israel repeatedly reiterates its commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Israel, like the United States, welcomes those who would make peace even as it fights those who would make war. Time and again, Israel has demonstrated its commitment to a Palestinian state living as its neighbor in peace and security. But there are no shortcuts on the path to this outcome, and there is no getting around the hard concessions that will have to be made. Although short-term security may be achievable unilaterally, peace is not; Palestinian rejectionism — whether by Hamas or Fatah — must be abandoned.